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A municipal reconstruction program

[Rochester]

1918

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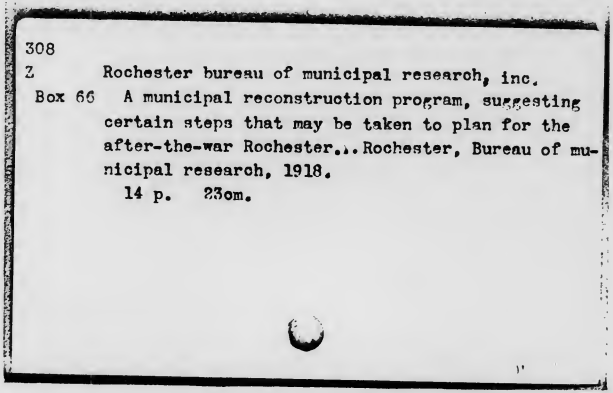

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Box 66 A municipal reconstruction program, suggesting certain steps that may be taken to plan for the after-the-war Rochester... Rochester, Bureau of municipal research, 1918.
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A MUNICIPAL RECONSTRUCTION PROGRAM

SUGGESTING CERTAIN STEPS
THAT MAY BE TAKEN
TO PLAN FOR THE
AFTER-THE-WAR ROCHESTER

ROCHESTER BUREAU OF MUNICIPAL RESEARCH, INC.

OCTOBER, 1918

Rochester Bureau of Muncipal Research, Inc.

(INCORPORATED APRIL 20, 1915)

The purpose of the Bureau is two-fold:

1—To get things done for the community through **cooperation with persons who are in office,** by increasing efficiency and eliminating waste.

2—To serve as an independent, non-partisan agency for **keeping citizens informed about the city's business.**

COOPERATION Every sincere and earnest man in the public service is eager to profit by the experience of others, and to use all sources of information as to the methods of conducting public business. He wishes to do his work well, to handle his job efficiently and with a minimum waste of time, money and effort, although he often works under handicaps which should not exist.

This Bureau has placed itself at the service of public officers in Rochester, to assist them in the accomplishment of this purpose. It seeks to do this primarily by getting at facts and profiting by a frank acceptance of their logic. But it strives also to help public officers remove handicaps under which they may work, so that men may be as free in public office as in private business to develop methods and adopt measures for efficiency.

INFORMATION Every good citizen is interested in what government is doing, how it is being done, and what it costs. It is often difficult, sometimes impossible, for the citizen to get such information from a source that is constant; well-informed and trained in analysis, and therefore reliable; without bias or prejudice, and so entirely trustworthy.

This Bureau has undertaken to furnish such a source of information, in order that the people of Rochester, when they consider their municipal government and discuss its merits or demerits, may be assured that such consideration and discussion rest on a basis of fact.

The Bureau believes that Rochester has good city government. But—with the quality of citizenship here available, with some measure of intelligent planning, of enlightened public cooperation—the Bureau sees no reason why Rochester should not have the most progressive and serviceable municipal government in the United States.

To this end it solicits the continuing interest and cooperation of every public officer and of every citizen.

17 Feb. 1920 - C.R.W.

FOREWORD

This pamphlet is compiled and sent to friends of the Rochester Bureau of Municipal Research to outline steps which the Bureau believes may be taken to help meet after-the-war problems in Rochester. The Bureau began, some months ago, to realize the necessity for thinking of what the city will have to do and be at the end of the war, when those citizens who are now fighting for freedom on foreign soil will return to their civil tasks and their civic interests and duties.

The whole world is discussing the "new social order" that is to follow the war. Many voices are raised, voices of hope and voices of promise. They speak in almost infinite variety, but they unite in this: We must think and plan. The new social order must be planned, not haphazard.

The Rochester Bureau of Municipal Research is a Rochester institution. Its primary interests are local, its field primarily restricted to work in and for and with the government and people of the city of Rochester. But it cannot do its work well in a parochial spirit. It is therefore attempting first to understand the currents of world and national thought, and then to interpret that thought—so far as it can now be analyzed—in such terms as may be applicable to the problems of community life and of municipal government in Rochester. Only thus can it help the city to realize and express its true community of interest with every other city of the country and of the free nations of the world.

The Bureau offers no apology for "thinking too big." We should fear most of all to think too small. It is better to accomplish part of a largely conceived program than to accomplish all of a small plan conceived in a hesitating and fearful spirit.

Cities are made great by the qualities of their citizenry. Civic greatness is not alone a product of daring and adventurous commerce and of the genius of industry. The city of the future will be great because of the intellectual and spiritual capacities of its people, because of their ability to see clearly enough and far enough to perceive that the qualities of mind and of spirit that make men great will make cities

great. There are no patents of nobility for cities. But there is the promise of nobility for that city which plans its community organization, its government, its educational institutions, its social instruments so as to promote the breeding and rearing of fine men and women, in freedom and discipline.

These are facts of transcendent importance for Rochester, New York, in this year of war and promise, 1918. They are the most practical things of which we know. Our task is to help make them concrete—in streets and sewers, in houses and schools, in health service, in public utilities, in social agencies, in governmental organization and administration—for the days of reconstruction.

Rochester Bureau of Municipal Research, Inc.

Rochester, N. Y., October 25, 1918.

THE BROAD OUTLINES OF A RECONSTRUCTION STUDY.

The Bureau of Municipal Research has offered its services for cooperation with the Bureau of City Planning in a study of reconstruction problems that will have to be faced at the end of the war. Before this offer was made the Board of Trustees had approved the proposal that we undertake a reconstruction planning study, asking that the Director report back to the Board with recommendations as to the details of such a study.

We were led to consider the desirability of a reconstruction study by the necessity of planning for public work which may be undertaken at the end of the war to absorb men released from military service and labor released from war industry. But it is believed that the best results in such an undertaking as is proposed cannot be accomplished unless the problems of reconstruction are conceived of in the broadest possible spirit. It is necessary, first of all, to sketch in the broad outlines so that we may see the picture as a whole. Having done this, it will be proper to consider what different aspects of the problem may be handled by various civic and commercial agencies, and what may be handled by the municipality acting as a representative of all the people. Our primary interest will, of course, be in the latter field, but I believe we shall prove ourselves incapable of doing that work well unless we show the capacity to see that work in its relation to the whole.

We are led to this point of view by a mass of evidence which is steadily piling up that the people of the Allied countries are thinking of reconstruction in a way that could not have been anticipated by the most imaginative minds in 1914. It seems now to be accepted as a commonplace that the world to which we shall return will not be the world of 1914. Opinions as to how great the change will be depend upon the points of view of various groups and factions, ranging from the ultra-visionary of the type of the Russian Bolsheviki to the ultra-reactionary who believes that we must return to pre-war conditions without any social, economic or industrial changes. Somewhere between these extreme views sensible men will find a basis upon which to stand, and it is our problem in Rochester to assist in the formulation of a program that will satisfy the legitimate demands of a live democratic

feeling, and at the same time build whatever new structure is to be erected upon the sure foundation of American experience and ideals.

Several circumstances show that even in America men are giving serious consideration to the problem of reconstruction, and that in its broadest aspects. The National Research Council, acting as the Department of Science and Research of the Council of National Defense, recently wrote to this Bureau to inquire whether we had taken up the consideration of after-the-war or reconstruction problems, or were planning to do so, stating that the Committee on Reconstruction Problems of the National Research Council was trying to get together facts as to the agencies and activities "who have entered upon this important duty of civic preparedness."

The American Association of Engineers has appointed a committee to study after-the-war conditions.

Information has just come that the War Labor Policies Board, of the Department of Labor, has under way certain work on reconstruction problems.

The National Municipal League, which represents a wide variety of individuals and associations interested in civic and governmental matters, has appointed a Committee on Reconstruction. This Committee is planning for a conference of the National Municipal League to be held in Rochester the week of November 18th, to discuss problems of reconstruction. Prominent speakers are to participate in this meeting, which is intended to attract the attention of the country to the field of reconstruction, so that constructive thinking may be started.

These circumstances are referred to in order to make clear the considerations which have influenced your staff in drawing up an outline for a study of reconstruction planning for Rochester. We do not, of course, believe this Bureau should undertake leadership in each direction in which it is proposed that some movement be made, but we do believe that some central intelligence should be aware of the whole problem, in order that all possible agencies may be coordinated in planning for the after-the-war Rochester. Since a plan for such coordinated action must be presented by some one, we believe this Bureau has a unique opportunity. It is with this in mind that we suggest the following items as desirable to be taken into account in the proposed study for reconstruction planning in Rochester.

There are problems having to do with financial, economic and industrial questions that are not touched upon here because they are of such a nature as to call for national, rather than local, discussion and action. It would be an evidence of inadequate thinking if, in a general consideration of reconstruction matters, we were to show ourselves oblivious to these more complex and difficult questions, but our immediate and practical interest is in those problems that may be attacked with some hope of successful action by the municipal government and by local private agencies.

It is believed a reconstruction planning study for Rochester should take into account the following:

. I.—Certain questions concerned with the intensive development of facilities and activities already existing and under way.

1—City planning in the conventional sense, including:

(a) The development of a system of main and intermediate thoroughfares, regulation of street widths, development of a program for the extension of pavements, sewers, water mains, other utilities.

(b) The establishment of zoning districts and more complete building regulations.

(c) Plans for a civic center, such new municipal buildings as may be needed, further development of the parkway and boulevard system and of the general playground and recreational facilities.

(d) The study of transportation facilities, including steam and electric railways and water transportation, particularly a consideration of rapid transit so that it may be developed to permit many to work in the city and live in the country.

2—The production, regulation and distribution of food and food products, as they affect the citizen's ability to live cheaply and healthfully.

3—The development of more comprehensive educational facilities, especially with a view to making education more thoroughly fit the child of the average man, not only for a useful, but for an intelligent life.

4—The general community health and welfare, with consideration of such industrial questions as the labor of women and children, especially what place the labor of women shall have in the new social order.

5—The education and direction of the labor supply, so that men may be fitted to jobs and jobs to men, and all industrial enterprises may cooperate in the scientific development of the general labor market in such a way as to be of advantage to industry in all its relations and to work for solution of the problems of seasonal employments, as in agriculture.

6—The forms and processes of local government, with studies to determine whether the existing municipal and county governments are of such kind as best to promote the expansion and growth of the city, particularly in view of new problems that have to be faced. This should include consideration of the problems of public employment.

7—The question of the municipality's undertaking to do its own public improvement work, with careful study of all suggestions for further extension of municipal functions (as in the field of public utilities), so that decisions may be the result of good business sense and sound judgment, and may take into account the experience of other cities and other countries.

II.—Certain questions concerned with the development of new governmental, social and industrial activities.

1—An industrial survey to determine whether the community is realizing the full possibilities of its peculiar fitness for certain kinds of industry, and whether existing industries are cooperating as fully as possible in measures of advantage to them and to the community.

2—The planning of the larger city from the new point of view that will give municipal authorities control of the use of land for specific purposes, so that industries shall be assisted to locate on sites of greatest advantage to them, but shall not be permitted to locate in such a way as to hurt the physical life of the people or destroy aesthetic values.

3—Power and fuel, considered from a point of view that will work toward the greatest possible utilization of natural resources, and the creation and distribution of heat and power in the most economical manner.

4—Housing, studied especially with a view to the development of the garden-suburb and garden-city ideas as they have been worked out in England, perhaps along the lines of giving to joint stock corporations that will undertake these enterprises the power of eminent domain (under proper regulation and control) and state or federal aid in the form of long term loans at low rates of interest.

The agencies that have been considered as to be brought into such a program of reconstruction planning in Rochester would include, first of all, the Bureau of City Planning and the City Planning Advisory Board, as well as the Departments of Public Instruction, Public Works, and other municipal departments; the Chamber of Commerce, with its various councils interested in different phases of the problems suggested; representatives of employers and employees, agencies interested in the health of the community, agencies interested in the betterment of the community's educational facilities, civic and welfare organizations, women's clubs, etc. The Bureau's part would be actually to handle certain parts of some studies and to act with regard to others merely as a suggestive or accelerative agency, helping to create public sentiment for intelligent consideration and wise solution.

Some of the subjects suggested for inquiry or study will immediately present themselves as impossible of adequate solution through action by one community alone, no matter how interested and enlightened that community may be nor how willing to attack the problems with energy. This is for two reasons. In the first place, a proposal that involves a marked departure from present custom or practice may be impossible of adoption without revision of state or national laws. Secondly, even given the legal power to undertake certain new enterprises, some of the things that might be proposed will require the cooperation of communities widely separated.

In such circumstances it will not be sufficient for Rochester to reach a decision concerning a particular proposal, but there will have to be the same movement of public opinion in other communities of the state and nation. This does not lessen the responsibility which rests upon us, but rather increases it. Rochester should help to lead the public thinking of the country in the search for intelligent solutions of these vital questions which press themselves upon us.

Note: The foregoing is from a memorandum, dated September 23, 1918, addressed to the Board of Trustees of the Rochester Bureau of Municipal Research by the Director.

THE BUREAU'S POSITION.

The following is an excerpt from the minutes of a meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Rochester Bureau of Municipal Research, held September 30, 1918:

"The Board discussed the Bureau's reconstruction planning study, especially the memorandum referring to this question which had been submitted to the Board under date of September 23, 1918, by the Director. In the discussion, reference was made to the point that it would be of advantage to the Bureau to inform itself concerning all possible phases of reconstruction in order to attend more effectively to those things in its particular field. It was moved and seconded that it was the sense of the Board that it would be wise for the staff to procure such information on the various problems concerned with the general question of reconstruction as might make the staff useful to various city departments or other local agencies interested in these problems; this, however, to be done in such a way as not to interfere with the regular activities of the Bureau. The motion was unanimously adopted."

SOME POSSIBLE FIRST STEPS

It may be of value to offer an outline of specific work which it is believed the city may undertake immediately at the end of the war to help relieve possible labor congestion. Plans should be formulated now, so that the program for construction can immediately get under way. The plans should include measures for financing, organizing and controlling such improvements.

While the Bureau of Municipal Research will be interested in and keep in touch with all steps taken by the city along the lines suggested in the following, the Bureau will not assume to do more than to cooperate with the city largely in a consulting and advisory capacity. The Bureau staff already is actively working along a number of the lines indicated. But the scope of the program here presented points emphatically to the need for the city to bring into counsel all local agencies interested, and to obtain the best available expert advice to deal directly with special features.

Recognizing that wide differences of opinion may exist, no attempt is made to arrange the several suggested activities in the order of their importance, or the order in which they should be undertaken. In fact, it will no doubt be felt that the entire program should go forward at one time—certainly that all necessary studies should begin at once.

STREET DEVELOPMENT

A program for street development seems to offer a ready means for employing at short notice large quantities of skilled and unskilled labor. In preparing such a program the several points indicated following should be given consideration.

Street Layout

By this is meant the development of a system of main and intermediate thoroughfares and connecting parkways and boulevards. This should include plans for immediate steps toward constructing main thoroughfares and other necessary streets, and a clearly defined policy for governing future additions to and changes in the existing street system.

Street Design and Construction

Steps should be taken at once to obtain data necessary for designing streets to meet traffic conditions, and to revise and modernize the specifications governing pavement construction.

Extension of Sewers and Water Mains

Plans for this work should go hand in hand with plans for the improvement of now unimproved streets.

Regulation of Pavement Cuts

This is partially a design problem, and has to do with the policy of the city toward requiring public utility corporations and its own Sewer and Water Bureaus to refrain from making unnecessary and frequent cuts in newly constructed pavements.

Building Zones

This has to do with the establishment of building zones for the regulation of the kinds of structures built on property abutting on certain classes of streets, as defined by the street layout.

General Financial Policy

This has to do with defining the policy of the city toward meeting the expense of constructing and reconstructing pavements, especially in main thoroughfares. The use of excess condemnation should be given most careful consideration.

Order of Work

It is necessary to anticipate the amount of work that can be handled at one time, and to plan for making needed improvements in the order of their relative importance.

BUILDING REGULATION

The reasons for the regulation of building by municipalities are well recognized, and many cities have already taken steps toward the establishment of comprehensive building restrictions. Formulation of policy in this respect should accompany preparation of a street development program.

Building Zones

The establishment of building zones (as mentioned above under "street development") should be undertaken in connection with the preparation of a city map, or street layout. The purpose of building zones is to protect industrial, commercial and residential property each from encroachment by the others.

Regulation of Heights of Buildings

There may appear to be no immediate problem of this kind in Rochester, but in connection with a general plan for building regulation, and certainly in connection with the revised building code, provision should be made for legally regulating the heights of future buildings.

Building Code

Not only should the policy of the city towards the location and general structural features of buildings be clearly defined, but the existing building code, which defines the types of construction approved by the city, requires modification and bringing up to date.

PUBLIC BUILDINGS

As a means for absorbing unemployed labor at the end of the war, the construction of new public buildings is important.

Additional Schools

The schools in Rochester are badly overcrowded, and as a step toward a comprehensive educational program, the plans already under consideration by the Board of Education for the construction of additional schools should be encouraged for the fullest development. It is believed there can be no difference of opinion as to the importance of additional schools.

The Civic Center

Rochester is badly in need of a civic center, with a new City Hall and possibly other public buildings. This is work which can be undertaken immediately at the end of the war, if suitable plans are made in advance.

TRANSPORTATION FACILITIES

In a broad sense this study should include steam and electric railways and waterways, but the immediate problem is concerned more directly with conditions within the city.

Rapid Transit

The development of plans for the use of the old canal bed as a subway may well be given consideration for the provision of rapid transit, so that the city's growth may be anticipated and directed into wholesome channels. Such construction would make possible the employment of much labor.

Harbor Development

Studies of the Port of Rochester, as well as the canal harbor, now under way, should receive the hearty support of the community and be pushed to completion.

THE EXTENSION OF MUNICIPAL OPERATION

This has to do largely with the future policy of the city toward owning and operating plant and machinery for the construction of public improvements.

The Construction of Local Improvements

There are three possibilities which should be considered:

a—Continuation of the contract system of construction;
b—Construction by day labor by the city itself;
c—Combination of contract work with day labor, in that the city might furnish all materials and accept bids only for labor and plant.

Municipal Asphalt Plant

It is believed the city should operate its own asphalt plant. The type of plant, its location and use should be decided upon. Ownership of such a plant would have a direct bearing upon the future policy of the city as to construction work.

Municipal Ownership of Sand and Gravel Beds and Stone Quarries

The city should consider whether it might not be good policy for it to supply itself with sand, gravel and stone for its construction work. The location and cost of purchasing sand and gravel beds and stone quarries, and of producing and transporting these materials, should be investigated.

New Garbage Plant

The existing garbage reduction plant is inefficient in operation. Steps should be taken toward the construction of a new plant of a type to be decided upon.

WHAT THE BUREAU OF CITY PLANNING IS DOING.

The following is from a letter written by Mr. James G. Cutler, President of the City Planning Advisory Board, to the Director of the Bureau of Municipal Research, under date of September 25, 1918:

"Your memorandum* is of particular interest to me. While it discusses a number of questions that are outside our special field, several of the things which it suggests as desirable to be taken into account in a reconstruction planning study are included in the program of the City Planning Bureau and are already receiving the attention of that Bureau and of the City Planning Advisory Board. I feel sure the Bureau will welcome the cooperation of the Bureau of Municipal Research in the consideration of these and other questions as plans develop.

"The first matter which presses with us is the practical necessity for making certain readjustments to bring streets which have been laid out and offered for dedication into some reasonable relation to existing streets. There is a very considerable amount of this work which must be done as rapidly as possible.

"While most of the broader questions are therefore necessarily deferred for the time, we are attempting to anticipate the city's growth in planning for new additions. For instance, we have already taken up with the School Board the question of providing suitable sites for additional schools and the provision, in connection with such sites, of adequate space for playgrounds. Just how far this large project can be rendered effective will depend, of course, upon the extent to which we are able to forecast the development of new centers of population.

"Such a broad development of general community planning as you are suggesting should help us greatly in this and in other work. I feel safe in saying that the City Planning Bureau and the Advisory Board may be relied upon to do their part in any comprehensive planning program which may be undertaken."

*Of September 23, 1918, quoted in the foregoing.

ROCHESTER BUREAU OF MUNICIPAL RESEARCH, INC.

(INCORPORATED APRIL 20, 1915)

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